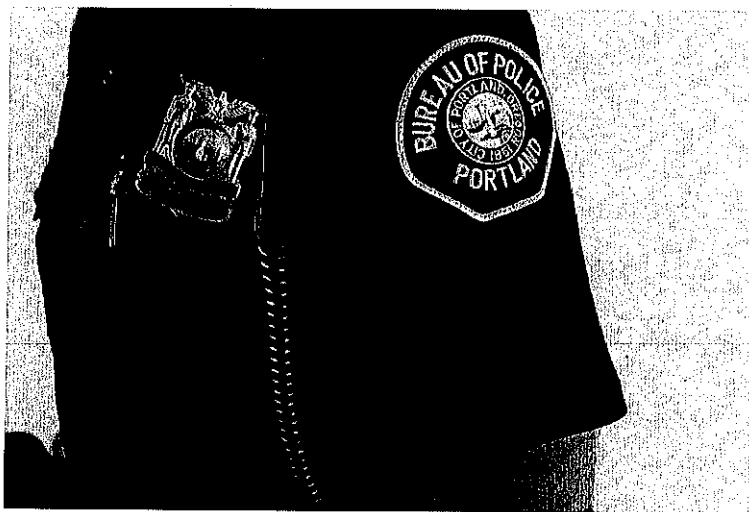


Portland Police Bureau drafts new policy on responding to mental health crises



(The Oregonian)



[<http://connect.oregonlive.com/staff/mabernst/index.html>] By Maxine Bernstein | The Oregonian/OregonLive

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The Portland Police Bureau has drafted a much-expanded policy that stresses the need for officers to recognize behaviors "characteristic" of mental illness and safely de-escalate encounters.

The new "Mental Health Crisis

Response" [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507284>] directive requires officers to use special skills to avoid unnecessary violence and potential civil liability.

The bureau is seeking comment on the policy and five other bureau directives through Jan. 31.

A comment form [http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/43843?action=UpdateItem&category_id=1462&input1462_2=000.00] is on the bureau's website.

The mental crisis response policy follows a federal judge's approval last summer of a negotiated settlement between the city of Portland and the U.S. Department of Justice that required changes to Portland police policies, training and oversight. The settlement stemmed from a federal investigation that found police had a pattern of using excessive force against people with mental illness or people perceived to have a mental illness.

In deciding how to respond to a call involving someone suffering a mental health crisis, officers are supposed to assess the risk to themselves, the subject of the call and others. They're also supposed to evaluate if police involvement is necessary.

"Many persons affected by mental illness or in crisis are not dangerous and some may only present dangerous behavior under certain circumstances or conditions," the new directive says.

Officers are given response options, including not engaging with the person, walking away from a call or delaying taking the person into custody if police can return at a safer time.

"Non-engagement or disengagement are tactics that can be used if the member determines that contact or continued contact with the person will result in an undue safety risk to the person, the public and/or members," the new policy states. If this is done, officers must document what they did and why in a written report.

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Also under the new policy, the police records division will flag anyone taken into civil custody on a mental health hold with "mental illness" written on the report, and forward copies of all mental health-related police reports to the bureau's Behavioral Health Unit.

People flagged as having a "mental illness" in the police database will be purged 10 years after their last known law enforcement contact, according to the directive.

It says emergency dispatchers will "generally dispatch" the closest available officer trained as an Enhanced Crisis Intervention Team member to mental crisis calls. But those officers won't be sent as the "primary" officer unless the call is in their assigned district. The specially trained officers, however, can offer to serve as the primary officer if they know the person in crisis or can coordinate a broader response.

The **four other directives** [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/59757>] are:

310.00, Conduct, Professional [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507271>]. This requires officers, whether on duty or off, not to commit "any act tending to bring reproach or discredit upon the Bureau or the City." The more difficult part to enforce may be the fourth element of the directive: "Members shall not spread rumors in regard to other members, citizens, future policies or activities."

310.40, Courtesy, [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507276>] which hasn't changed much from the current directive.

312.50, Identification [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507279>]. This requires officers to visibly display their police badge and name tag on their outermost garment and offer their police business cards after making a vehicle or pedestrian stop, responding to an emergency call or when doing so "would improve customer service or customer relations due to the nature, duration or intensity of the contact or stop (ie, when making an arrest, conducting a search or impounding a vehicle.)" Officers will hand over a business card to someone who requests one, unless the request "is clearly an attempt to harass, delay or manipulate the contact or investigation," the policy says.

317.40, Authorized Use of Bureau Equipment [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507282>] is similar to the current policy.

850.25, Police Response to Mental Health Facilities [<http://www.portlandoregon.gov/police/article/507286>]. This urges residential mental health facilities to direct calls first to their facility administrator or the Multnomah County Call Center. Officers may be called to help the facility staff "in restoring order within the facility or to respond to a serious crime in progress." Before entering the facility, police are to consider severity of the threat and options to resolve it. The Behavioral Health Unit is to gather all floor plans for these facilities and distribute them to precinct commanders and the Special Emergency Response Team.

--Maxine Bernstein

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